

ISLAM AND THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF THE MUSLIM

A REPRINT OF:

ISLAM AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MUSULMAN

ANDRE SERVIER

TRANSLATED BY

A. S. MOSS-BLUNDELL

WITH A PREFACE BY LOUIS BERTRAND

LONDON

CHAPMAN HALL LTD.

1924

BILL WARNER, EDITOR

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF

POLITICAL ISLAM

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V 2.29.2012

PUBLISHED BY CSPI, LLC

WWW.CSPIPUBLISHING.COM

PRINTED IN THE USA

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

This book is a reprint of a very valuable book that clearly lays out Islamic intellectual and political history as a function of Islamic doctrine. It is fascinating to see how the doctrine of Islam functions the same, century after century. What was happening a century ago is more intense today than ever.

It is tragic that nearly a hundred years after the publication of this book, we still have a citizenry who remains ignorant about the political effects of Islam.

The original content of Mr. Servier's books has been preserved, but has been typeset in a new format. Also, the spelling has been modernized. There are two weak spots, but these have been preserved with a short comment.

Bill Warner, Editor

February 22, 2012

PREFACE

I have not the honor of Mr. André Servier's personal acquaintance: I only know *La Psychologie du Musulman*, of which he has been kind enough to send me the manuscript. The work impresses me as excellent, destined to render the greatest service to the French cause throughout Northern Africa, and at the same time to enlighten the natives themselves as to their own past history.

What I admire most of all is his vigorous assault upon the great mass of French ignorance. One of the prejudices most likely to lead us to disaster lies in the belief that our African rule is nothing more than an incident in the history of the country, in the same way as we look upon the Roman dominion. There is a number of writers who persistently maintain that Rome made but a short stay in Africa, that she remained there but a century or two. That is a monstrous error. The effective empire of Rome in Africa began with the destruction of Carthage, 146 B.C., and it only came to an end with the Vandal invasion about the year 450 of the Christian era — say, six hundred years of effective rule. But the Vandals were Christians who carried on the Roman civilization in its integrity, and who spoke and wrote Latin. In the same way, the Byzantines who succeeded them, even if they did not speak Latin officially, were able to regard themselves as the legitimate heirs of Rome. That went on until the end of the seventh century.

So that Africa had eight hundred and fifty years of effective Latin domination. And if we consider that under the hegemony of Carthage the whole region, from the Syrtes [gulf near Tripoli - GC] to the Pillars of Hercules, was more or less Hellenized or Latinized, we arrive at the conclusion that Northern Africa had thirteen hundred years of Latinity, whereas it can only reckon twelve hundred years of Islam.

The numerous and very important ruins that even up to the present time cover the country bear witness to the deep penetration of Greco-Latin civilization into the soil of Africa. Of all these dead cities the only one the uninstructed Frenchman or even the Algerian knows is Timgad. But the urban network created by the Romans embraced the whole of North Africa up to the edge of the Sahara; and it is in these very regions bordering on the desert that Roman remains are most abundant. If we were willing to go to the trouble and expense of excavating them, were it only to bring to light the claims of Latinity in Africa, we should be astonished by the great number of these towns, and as often as not by their beauty. Mr. André Servier is well aware of all this; but he goes a good deal further. With a patience and minuteness equally wonderful, he proves scientifically that the Arabs have never invented anything except Islam — that “secretion of the Arab brain,” that they have made absolutely no addition to the ancient heritage of Greco-Latin civilization.

It is only a superficial knowledge that has been able to accept without critical examination the belief current among Christians during the Middle Ages, which attributed to Islam the Greek science and philosophy of which Christianity had no longer any knowledge. In the centuries that have followed, the Sectarian spirit has found it to be to its interest to confirm and propagate this error. In its hatred of Christianity it has had to give Islam the honour of what was the invention, and, if we may so express it, the personal property of our intellectual ancestors. Taking Islam from its first beginnings down to our own day, M. André Servier proves, giving chapter and verse, that all that we believe to be “Arab” or “Muslim,” or, to use an even vaguer word, “Oriental,” in the manners, the traditions and the customs of North Africa, in art as well as in the more material things of life — all that is Latin, unconsciously, or unknown to the outside world — it belongs to the Middle Ages we have left behind, our own Medievalism that we no longer recognize and that we naively credit as an invention of Islam.

The one and only creation of the Arabs is their religion. And it is this religion that is the chief obstacle between them and ourselves. In the interests of a good understanding with our Muslim subjects, we should

BEGINNING TEACHINGS

scrupulously avoid everything that could have the effect of strengthening their religious fanaticism, and on the contrary we should encourage the knowledge of everything that could bring us closer together — especially of any traditions we may have in common.

It is certainly our duty to respect the religious opinions of the natives; but it is mistaken policy for us to appear more Muslim than they themselves, and to bow down in a mystical spirit before a form of civilization that is very much lower than our own and manifestly backward and retrograde. The times are too serious for us to indulge any longer in the antics of dilettantism or of played-out impressionism.

Mr. André Servier has said all this with equal truth, authority and opportuneness. The only reserves I would make reduce themselves to this: I have not the same robust faith as he has in the unlimited and continuous progress of humanity; and I am afraid that he is under some illusion in regard to the Turks, who are still the leaders of Islam, and are regarded by other Muslims as their future liberators. But all that is a question of proportion.

I am willing to believe in progress in a certain sense and up to a certain point; and I have no hesitation in agreeing that the Turks are the most congenial of Orientals, until the day when we, by our want of foresight and our stupidity, provide them with the means of becoming once more the enemy with whom we shall have to reckon.

LOUIS BERTRAND

PARIS,

23rd September, 1922.



A MUSLIM POLICY

CHAPTER 1

France needs a Muslim policy inspired by realities and not by received opinions and legends — We can only understand any given portion of the Muslim people by studying Arab history, because of the solidarity of all Muslims and because Islam is nothing but a secretion of the Arab brain — There is no such thing as Arab civilization — The origins of the legend — How modern historians and the scholars of the Middle Ages were deceived — The Arab is a realist and has no imagination — He has copied the ideas of other peoples, distorting them in the process — Islam, by its immutable dogmas, has paralysed the brain and killed all initiative

THAT France is a great Mohammedan Power may be a commonplace, but it is a truth that ceases to be a platitude, however often repeated, when we remember that our country holds in tutelage more than twenty million Mohammedans; and that these millions are firmly united by the solidarity of their religion to the formidable block of three hundred million adherents of the Prophet.

This block is divided superficially by racial rivalries, and even at times by conflicting interests. But such is the influence exerted by religion upon individuality, so great is its power of domination, that the mass forms a true nation in the midst of other peoples, a nation whose various portions, melted in the same crucible, obedient to the same ideal, sharing the same philosophic conceptions, are animated by the same bigoted belief in the excellence of their sacred dogma, and by the same hostile mistrust of the foreigner — the infidel.

Such is the Muslim nation.

Islam is not only a religious doctrine that includes neither skeptics nor renegades,¹ it is a country; and if the religious nationalism, with which all Muslim brains are impregnated, has not as yet succeeded in threatening humanity with serious danger, it is because the various peoples, made one by virtue of this bond, have fallen into such a state of decrepitude and decadence that it is impossible for them to struggle against the material forces

1 De Castries, *L'Islam*.

placed by science and progress at the disposal of Western civilization.¹ It is to the very rigidity of its dogma, the merciless constraint it exercises over their minds, and the intellectual paralysis with which it strikes them, that this low mentality is to be attributed.

But even such as it is, Islam is by no means a negligible element in the destiny of humanity. The mass of three hundred million believers is growing daily, because in most Muslim countries the birth-rate exceeds the death-rate, and also because the religious propaganda is constantly gaining new adherents among tribes still in a state of barbarism.

The number of converts during the last twenty years in British India is estimated at six millions; and a similar progress has been observed in China, Turkestan, Siberia, Malaysia, and Africa. Nevertheless the active propaganda of the White Fathers is successfully combating Muslim proselytism in the Dark Continent. It behooves us then, as Le Chatelier says, to make an intelligent study of Islam, and to found thereon a Muslim policy whose beneficent action may extend not only over our African colonies but over the whole Muslim world.

We have got to realize the necessity of treating over twenty million natives in some better way than tacitly ignoring them. For they will always be the only active population of our Central and West African colonies, whilst their present numerical superiority in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco cannot fail to increase as time goes on.²

Only by a thorough understanding of the mentality and psychology of the Muslim, and by discarding prejudice and legend, can we achieve any really useful and permanent work.

It would be puerile to imagine that we can safely confine this study to our own Muslim subjects, with the object of governing them wisely. As we have already remarked, the Muslim is not an isolated individual; the Tunisian, the Algerian, the Moroccan, the Sudanese are not individuals whose horizon stops at the artificial boundaries created by diplomatists and geographers. To whatever political formation they may belong, they are first and foremost citizens of Islam. They belong morally, religiously, intellectually to the great Muslim Fatherland, of which the capital is Mecca, and whose ruler — theoretically undisputed — is the Commander of the Faithful. Their mentality has in the course of centuries been slowly kneaded, molded and impregnated by the religious doctrine of the Prophet, and

1 André Semer, *Le Nationalisme Musulman*; P. AntUmarohi, *Le Nationalisme Egyptien*; Henri Marchand, *L'Egypte et le Nationalisme Egyptien*.

2 Alfred Le Chatelier, *La Politique Musulmane*.

as this doctrine is nothing but a secretion of the Arab brain, it follows that we must study Arab history if we want to know and understand any portion of the Muslim world.

Such a study is difficult, not from any dearth of documents — on the contrary, they abound, for Islam was born and grew up in the full light of history — but because the Muslim religion and the Arabs are veiled from our sight by so vast a cloud of accepted opinions, legends, errors, and prejudices that it seems almost impossible to sweep it away. And yet the task must be undertaken if we wish to get out of the depths of ignorance in which we are now sunk in regard to Muslim psychology.

Jules Lemaitre was once called upon to introduce to the public the work of a young Egyptian writer on Arab poetry. The author, a novice, declared with fine assurance that Arab literature was the richest and the most brilliant of all known literatures, and that Arab civilization was the highest and the most splendid. Jules Lemaitre, who in his judgments resembled Sainte-Beuve in his preference for moderate opinions, felt some reluctance to countersign such a statement. On the other hand the obligations of courtesy prevented him from laying too much stress upon the poverty and bareness of Arab literature. He got out of the difficulty very cleverly by the following somewhat reserved statement:

“It is difficult to understand how a civilization so noble, so brilliant, whose manifestations have never lost their charm, and which in times past had so remarkable a power of expansion, seems to have lost its virtue in these latter days. It is one of the sorrows and mysteries of history.”

As the observation of a subtle mind, accustomed never to accept blindly current opinions as such, this is perfectly justified. For if we admit all the qualities that are habitually attributed to Arab civilization, if we are ready to bow in pious awe before the fascinating splendour with which poets and historians have adorned it, then it is indeed difficult to explain how the Empire of the Caliphs can have fallen into the state of decrepitude in which we see it today, dragging downward in its fall nations who, under other governance, had shown unquestionable aptitudes for civilization.

How is it that the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Berbers, as soon as they became Islamized, lost the energy, the intelligence and the spirit of initiative they exhibited under the domination of Greece and Rome? How has it come about that the Arabs themselves, who, according to the historians, were the professors of science and philosophy in the West, can have forgotten all their brilliant accomplishments and have sunk into a state of ignorance that today relegates them to the barbarous nations?

If we persist in asking these questions, it is for the sole reason that we have never really got to the bottom of the causes of the rapid expansion of Arab conquest, that we have never placed this conquest in its proper historical frame, in a circle of exceptionally favorable circumstances. We have never penetrated the psychology of the Muslim, and are consequently not in a position to understand how and why the immense Empire of the Caliphs went to pieces; how and why it was fated to collapse; how, stricken by paralysis and death by a rigid religious doctrine that dominated and controlled every act of daily life, every manifestation of activity, having no conception of material progress as an ideal worthy to be pursued, how this baneful influence has kept its adherents apart from and outside of the great currents of civilization.

In all that concerns Islam and the Muslim nations, we, in Europe, live under the shadow of an ancient error that from the remotest epochs has falsified the judgment of historians and has often led statesmen to assume an attitude and come to decisions by no means in accordance with actual facts. This error lies in crediting the Arabs with a civilizing influence they have never possessed.

The mediaeval writers, for want of exact documentation, used to include under the designation of Arabs any people professing the Muslim religion; they saw the East through a fabulous mirage of those legends with which ignorance then surrounded all far distant countries; they thus labored unconsciously to spread this error.

In this they were helped by the Crusaders, rough and coarse men for the most part, soldiers rather than scholars, who had been dazzled by the superficial luxury of Oriental courts, and who brought back from their sojourn in Palestine, Syria or Egypt, judgments devoid of all critical value. Other circumstances contributed equally to create this legend of Arab civilization.

The establishment of the government of the Caliphs in the North of Africa, in Sicily, and then in Spain, brought about relations between the West and the countries of the Orient. In consequence of these relations, certain scientific and philosophical works written in Arabic or translated from Arabic into Latin, reached Europe, and the learned clerks of the Middle Ages, whose scientific baggage was of the lightest, frankly admired these writings, which revealed to them knowledge and methods of reasoning that to them were new.

They became enthusiastic over this literature, and, in perfect good faith, drew from it the conclusion that the Arabs had reached a high degree of scientific culture.

Now, these writings were not the original productions of Arab genius, but translations of Greek works from the Schools of Alexandria and Damascus, first drawn up in Syriac, then in Arabic at the request of the Abbassid Caliphs, by Syrian scribes who had gone over to Islam.

These translations were not even faithful reproductions of the original works, but were rather compilations of extracts and glosses, taken from the commentators upon Aristotle, Galen, and Hippocrates, belonging to the Schools of Alexandria and Damascus; notably of Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus, Porphyrius, Lamblichus, Longinus, Proclus, etc.¹

And these extracts already distorted by two successive translations, from Greek into Syriac, and from Syriac into Arabic, were still further disfigured and curtailed by the spirit of intolerance of the Muslim scribes. The thought of the Greek authors was drowned in the religious formulae imposed by Islamic dogma; the name of the author translated was not mentioned, so that European scholars could have no suspicion that the work before them was a translation, an imitation, or an adaptation; and so they attributed to the Arabs what really belonged to the Greeks.²

The majority of the mediaeval scholars did not even know these works, but only adaptations of them made by Abulcasis, Avicenna, Maimonides and Averrhoës. The latter drew especially from the Pandects of Medicine of Aaron, a Christian priest of Alexandria, who had himself compiled certain fragments of Galen and translated them into Syriac. The works of Averrhoës, Avicenna, and Maimonides were translated into Latin, and it was from this latest version that the mediaeval scholars made acquaintance with Arab science.

It is well to remember that at that epoch the greater part of the works of antiquity were unknown in Europe. The Arabs thus passed for inventors and initiators when in reality they were nothing but copyists. It was not until later, at the time of the Renaissance, when the manuscripts of the original authors were discovered, that the error was detected. But the legend of Arab civilization had already been implanted in the minds of men, where it has remained, and the most serious historians still speak of it in this year of grace as an indisputable fact.

Montesquieu has remarked: "There are some things that everybody says, because somebody once said them."

Moreover, the historians have been deceived by appearances. The rapid expansion of Islam, which, in less than half a century after the death of

1 Barthélémy Saint-Hilaire, *Histoire de l'École d'Alexandrie*

2 Snouck Hurgronje, *Le Droit Musulman*

Mohammad, brought into subjection to the Caliphs an immense empire stretching from Spain to India, has led them to suppose that the Arabs had attained a high degree of civilization. After the historians, the contemporary men of letters, in their fondness for exoticism, contributed still more to falsify judgment by showing us a conventional Arab world, in the same way as they have shown us an imaginary Japan, China, or Russia.¹

It is in this way that the legend of Arab civilization has been created. Whoever attempted to combat it was at once assailed with Caliph Haroun-al-Raschid's presents to Charlemagne — that wonderful clock that struck with astonishment the contemporaries of the old Emperor with the flowing beard.

Then so many illustrious names are quoted: Averrhoës, Avicenna, Avenzoar, Maimonides, Alkendi, to mention only those best known.

We shall show later on that these names cannot be invoked in favor of Arab civilization, and that moreover that civilization never existed.

There is a Greek civilization, and a Latin civilization; there is no Arab civilization, if by that word is meant the effort personal and original of a people towards progress. There may, perhaps, be a Muslim civilization, but it owes nothing to the Arabs, nor even to Islam. Nations converted to Mohammedanism only made progress because they belonged to other races than the Arab, and because they had not yet received too deeply the impress of Islam. Their effort was accomplished in spite of the Arabs, and in spite of Islamic dogma.

The prodigious success of the Arab conquest proves nothing. Attila, Genseric and Gengis Khan brought many peoples into subjection, and yet civilization owes them nothing.

A conquering people only exercises a civilizing influence when it is itself more civilized than the people conquered. Now, all the nations vanquished by the armies of the Caliph had attained, long before the Arabs, a high degree of culture, so that they were able to impart a little of what they knew, but received nothing in exchange. We shall come back to this later. Let us confine ourselves for the moment to the case of the Syrians and the Egyptians, whose Schools of Damascus and Alexandria collected the traditions of Hellenism; to North Africa, Sicily, and Spain, where Latin culture still survived; to Persia, India, and China, all three inheritors of illustrious civilizations.

The Arabs might have learned much by contact with these different peoples, It was thus that the Berbers of North Africa and the Spaniards

1 Dr. Gustave Le Bon, *La Civilization des Arabes*

very quickly assimilated Latin civilization, and in the same way the Syrians and the Egyptians assimilated Greek civilization so thoroughly that many of them, having become citizens of the Roman or of the Byzantine Empire, did honor in the career of art or letters to the country of their adoption.

In striking contrast to these examples, the conquering Arab remained a barbarian; but worse still, he stifled civilization in the conquered countries.

What have the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Spaniards, the Berbers, the Byzantines become under the Muslim yoke? And the people of India and Persia, what became of them after their submission to the law of the Prophet?

What has produced this illusion, and misled the historians, is the fact that Greco-Latin civilization did not immediately die out in the conquered countries. It was so full of life that it continued for two or three generations to send forth vigorous shoots behind a frontage of Mohammedanism. The fact explains itself. In the conquered countries the inhabitants had to choose between the Muslim religion and a miserable fate. "Believe or perish. Believe or become a slave," such were the conqueror's conditions. Since it is only the rare souls that are capable of suffering for an idea — and such chosen souls are never very numerous — and since the religions with which Islam came into collision — a moribund paganism, or Christianity hardly as yet established — did not exert any considerable influence upon men's minds, the greater part of the conquered peoples preferred conversion to death or slavery.

"Paris is well worth a Mass:" we know the formula.

The first generation, made Mohammedans by the simple will of the conqueror, received the Islamic impress but lightly, keeping its own mentality and traditions intact; it continued to think and act, in consideration of some few outward concessions to Islam, as it had always been used to do. Arabic being the official language, it expressed itself in Arabic; but it continued to think in Greek, in Latin, in Aramaic, in Italian or in Spanish. Hence those translations of the Greek authors, made by Syrians, translations that led our mediaeval scholars to believe that the Arabs had founded philosophy, astronomy and mathematics.

The second generation, brought up on Muslim dogma, but subject to the influence of its parents, still showed some originality; but the succeeding generations, now completely Islamized, soon fell into barbarism.

We observe this rapid decadence of successive generations under the Muslim yoke in all countries under Arab rule, in Syria, in Egypt and in

Spain. After a century of Arab domination there is a complete annihilation of all intellectual culture.

How is it that these people who, under Greek or Latin influence, have shown such a remarkable aptitude for civilization, have been stricken with intellectual paralysis under the Muslim yoke to such a degree that they have been unable to uplift themselves again, notwithstanding the efforts of Western nations in their behalf?

The answer is that their mentality has been deformed by Islam, which in itself is only a product, a secretion of the Arab mind.

Contrary to current opinion, the Arab is devoid of all imagination. He is a realist, who notes what he sees, and records it in his memory, but is incapable of imagining or conceiving anything beyond what he can directly perceive.

Purely Arab literature is devoid of all invention. The imaginative element apparent in certain works, such as the Arabian Nights, is of foreign origin.¹

We shall prove that in the course of this study. It is, moreover, this absence of the inventive faculties, a Semitic failing, that accounts for the utter sterility of the Arab in the arts of painting and sculpture. In literature, as in science and philosophy, the Arab has been a compiler. His intellectual beggary shows itself in his religious conceptions. In pagan times, before Mohammad, the Arab gods had no history, no legend lends poetry to their existence, no symbolism beautifies their cult. They are mere names, borrowed in all probability from other peoples, but behind these names there is . . . nothing.

Islam itself is not an original doctrine; it is a compilation of Greco-Latin traditions, biblical and Christian; but in assimilating materials so diverse, the Arab mind has stripped them of all poetical adornment, of the symbolism and philosophy he did not understand, and from all this he has evolved a religious doctrine cold and rigid as a geometrical theorem: — Allah, The Prophet, Mankind.

This doctrine is sometimes adorned by the nations who have adopted it and who have not the barren brain of the Arab, with quite an efflorescence of poetry and legend. But these foreign ornaments have been attacked with savage violence by the authorized representatives of Islamic dogma, and since the second century of the Hegira the Caliphs have decided, so as to avoid any variation of the religious dogma, to lay down exactly the spirit and the letter in the works of four orthodox doctors. It is forbidden to

¹ Dozy, ...:

make any interpretation of the sacred texts not sanctioned by these works, which have fixed the dogma beyond all possibility of change, and by the same stroke have killed the spirit of initiative and of intelligent criticism among all Muslim peoples, who have thus become, as it were, mumified to such an extent that they have stayed fixed like rocks in the rushing torrent that is bearing the rest of humanity onward towards progress.

From this time forward, the doctrine of Islam, reduced to the simplicity of Arab conception, has carried on its work of death with perfect efficiency inasmuch as it governs every act of the believer's life; it takes charge of him in his cradle, and leads him to the grave, through all the vicissitudes of life, never allowing him in any sphere of thought or activity the least vestige of liberty or initiative. It is a pillory that only allows a certain number of movements previously fixed upon.

To sum up: the Arab has borrowed everything from other nations, literature, art, science, and even his religious ideas. He has passed it all through the sieve of his own narrow mind, and being incapable of rising to high philosophic conceptions, he has distorted, mutilated and desiccated everything. This destructive influence explains the decadence of Muslim nations and their powerlessness to break away from barbarism; it equally explains the difficulties that confront the French in Northern Africa.

ISLAM AND THE DESERT

CHAPTER 2

For any comprehensive knowledge of Islam and the Muslim, it is necessary to study the Desert — The Arabian Desert — The Bedouin — The influence of the Desert — Nomadism — The dangerous life — Warrior and bandit — Fatalism — Endurance — Insensibility — The spirit of independence — Semitic anarchy — Egoism — Social organization — The tribe — Semitic Pride — Sensuality — The ideal — Religion — Lack of Imagination — Essential characteristics of the Bedouin.

TO know and understand the Muslim, We must study Islam. To know and understand Islam, we must study the Bedouin of Arabia; and to know and understand the Bedouin, we must study the Desert. For the desert environment explains the special mentality of the Bedouin, his conception of existence, his qualities and his defects. Consequently it explains Islam, a secretion of the Arab brain; and finally it explains the Muslim that Islam has run into its rigid mold. An immense plateau, rocky and sandy, 1,250 miles long with an average breadth of 500 miles, surrounded by a girdle of mountains with peaks rising 6,500 and occasionally 10,000 feet; between this lofty barrier and the sea a fertile strip of country 50 to 60 miles wide. That, in a few strokes, is the general aspect of Arabia¹.

The plateau is indeed what the Bedouins call it, "the land of terror and of thirst." Situated for the most part in the tropics, and shut off from the softening influences of the sea by a mountain wall that arrests the moist winds and causes the rain to fall on the coastal strip, it presents every variety of desert nature: the lava desert, or Harra; the stony desert, or Hammada; the desert of sand, or Nefoud, moving dunes, alkaline plains, and sebkas, whose salt crust breaks under one's footsteps.

The whole scene is wild and mournful. Those gentle undulations that rest the eye in countries with a normal climate, where centuries of cultivation have formed the soil, are unknown in the desert. There everything is disjointed, rough, bristling with hostility. In the basaltic and millstone regions the rocks

1 Palgrave, *A Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia*. Larroque, *Voyage dans l'Arabie heureuse Strabo*, Lib. xvi.

are hewn into sharp edges. The undulations of the surface are abrupt and steep, without any gradual transition.

If one could imagine the chain of the Alps submerged in alluvium up to within 800 to 500 feet of the summit, one would see nothing but a series of domes, peaks, needles, fallen rocks and denuded columns rising abruptly from the ground. That is what the Harra looks like, with its tortured skyline recalling vast cosmic upheavals.

Then there is the Hammada, a barren plain of stones, a vast glittering extent of naked rocks, with all the weariness of one color, where the wind has swept away every particle of vegetable earth, where extremes of heat and cold have split up the soil into slabs and splinters — a monstrous chaos of broken stone, where no living thing can flourish¹.

Further on is the Nefoud, a sea of sand passing out of sight, from whence emerge high dunes like huge waves petrified, with parallel gullies formed by the wind that keeps them incessantly in motion. Of one uniform tawny tint, this barren plain is of an appalling monotony. It is the domain of death, and either burns or freezes. The porosity of the sand multiplies the surfaces of absorption and of radiation, and the sun by day heats it up to such a degree that one dare not venture across it; at nightfall it loses this heat almost instantaneously, and becomes covered with frost.

Under the effect of the wind which is bottled up in these gullies, possibly also from expansion, the dunes give out strange sounds, which add to the wild horror of the solitude. They literally hum, like a metallic top, and some travellers have compared the noise to that made by a threshing-machine.²

Then there are vast stretches of gypsum, of a whiteness that is unbearable under the burning glare of the sun. And again there are the sebkas, once salt lakes, now dried up, on the surface of which the salt mixed with sand forms a crust full of holes over a quagmire.

Throughout the country vegetable soil is very scarce. Reduced to an impalpable powder by the general dryness, it is carried away by the wind, and is precipitated by the action of rain in less dry countries. Being subject within the same period of twenty-four hours to torrid heat and extreme cold (140° to 18° Fahr.), swept by winds either burning or freezing but always dry, the soil, whatever its nature, is stricken with barrenness.

Vegetation is rare in the desert; in the absence of rain, it can only obtain nourishment from water in the subsoil, and so can only thrive in deep basins, where the water-bearing stratum is near the surface. There are a

1 De Laborde and Linnant, *Voyage dans l'Arabie Pétrée*.

2 Gautier, *Le Sahara Algérien*.

few stunted plants in the ravines and the *wadies* — long depressions at the bottom of which one may find a little moisture by digging — some Artemisias, Brooms and Halophytic plants. Here and there, in sheltered places, a few puny shrubs of acacia and tamarisk carry on a forlorn struggle against the ever-encroaching sand.

There are no rivers, no springs, a few wells, far apart, constantly being covered by the shifting sand, and having to be cleaned out every time by the thirsty traveller.

Any considerable collection of human beings is impossible amid such hostile natural surroundings; they would be decimated by hunger and thirst. So there are no towns, nor even villages; only starveling families, for ever preoccupied by the anxieties of their existence, wandering in these wastes strewn with ambushes.

But if, leaving these dreary solitudes, one crosses the mountain barrier enclosing them, one descends suddenly into a wonderful country. The coastal region, watered by sea breezes, fertilized by the wadies, which in rainy weather roll in torrents from the heights, is, in comparison with the desert plateau, a land of plenty and delight. Between Medina and Mecca this strip is widened by the granitic plateau of Nedjed, an important mountain mass that catches the rains and feeds numerous springs.¹

Here are wells that never dry up, and oases where beneath the palms there is a two-storied vegetation of fruit trees, cereals, and perfume plants. Here too are pastures where horses, camels and sheep can thrive.

These are the favored countries of the Hedjaz, of Assir, Nedjed and the Yemen, of Hadramout and Oman, with populous towns such as Medina with Yambo as its port, Mecca with its port of Djeddah, Taif, Sana, Terim, Mirbat and Muscat. And yet the attraction of these fertile regions has not depopulated the desert.

The Bedouin has remained faithful to his desert, and as, by the side of the sedentary, less active tribes of a gentler mode of living, he represents the man of action restless and brutal, it is he who in the end has imposed his manners and mentality upon the whole of Arabia. It is him, therefore, that we have to study. No historical research is needed; immobility being the leading characteristic of the Arab tribes, the Bedouin has not changed. Such as he was when Mohammed drew him from his idol-worship, so we see him exactly described in the book of Genesis, in the passages relating to Ishmael or Joseph, or well represented in the bas-relief of the palace of

1 Maurice Tamisier, *Voyage en Arabie*.

Nineveh recording scenes from the wars of Assurbanipal, even so is he at the present day.¹

The desert condemns the individual to a special sort of life which develops certain faculties, certain qualities and certain defects. It is an existence full of difficulties, with danger everywhere; from the marauder prowling round the tent or round the flock, meditating a sudden dash: from the wind-enemy that dries up the water-hole and smothers the meagre vegetation in sand: from the rival who occupies a coveted pasture: from the soil that cracks into chasms.

The desert imposes as a first condition of existence — nomadism. It is not for pleasure that the Bedouin is always travelling, but from stern necessity. Cultivation being impossible on a barren soil deprived of vegetable humus and moisture, man is doomed to the shepherd's trade. But the pasturage, composed of sickly herbs growing in depressions sheltered from the wind, are of short duration and small extent. The flocks eat them down in a few days, when the shepherd must set about finding others; hence the necessity of being always on the move. When a pasture is found, he must make sure of its possession against other rivals, and, on occasion, use violence. It is a life of fever and of fighting, a rough and dangerous life.

But seldom can the Bedouin satisfy his hunger; he has everything to fear from nature and from man. Like a wild beast, he lives in a state of perpetual watchfulness. He relies chiefly upon robbery. Too poor to satisfy his desires, devoid of resources in an ill-favoured country, he is always ready to seize any chance that offers — a camel strayed from the herd provides him with a feast of meat: a sudden dash upon a caravan or the *douar* (camp) of a sedentary tribe furnishes him with dates, spices and women.

The practice of arms and the hard training he has always to live in have developed his warlike faculties; and, as it is these that enable him to triumph over the dangers of his wandering life and to procure the only satisfactions possible in the desert, he has come to consider them as his ideal.

The coward and the cripple are doomed to contempt and death. The respect of his neighbor is in proportion to the fear with which he inspires him. To win the praise of poets and the love of women, he must be a brilliant horseman, skilled in the use of sword and spear.

The women themselves have caught something of the martial spirit of their husbands and brothers; marching in the rear-guard they tend the

1 Dozy, *Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne*, t. i., p. 3. ;Delaporte, *La vie de Mahomet*, p. 47. Larroque, op. cit. p. 109. Lenormant, *Histoire des peuples Orientaux*, VI., p. 422. Strabo, Lib. v. 1. Noel DesVergers, *Hist. de l'Arabie*.

wounded and encourage their fighting men by reciting verses of a wild energy: "Courage," they chant, "defenders of women. Strike with the edge of your swords. Wear the daughters of the morning star; our feet tread upon soft cushions; our necks are decked with pearls; our hair is perfumed with musk. The brave who face the enemy, we press them in our arms; the base who flee, we cast them off and we deny them our love."¹

The necessity of providing for his own needs makes the Bedouin an active man; he is patient because of the sufferings he has to endure; he accepts the inevitable without vain recriminations.² It is not Islam that has created fatalism, but the desert; Islam has done no more than accept and sanction a state of mind characteristic of the nomad. His adventurous life gives the Bedouin courage, boldness, and if not contempt for death, at any rate a certain familiarity with it. Necessity compels him to be selfish. The available pasturage is too scanty to be shared, he keeps it for himself and his own people; it is the same with the watering place. He kills his infant daughters, who are the source of difficulties; and sometimes even his little boys, when the family is becoming too numerous. Hard on himself, he is hard upon others too; holding his life so cheap, he thinks nothing of his neighbor's. "Never has lord of our race died in his bed," says a poet. "On the blades of swords flows our blood, and our blood flows only over sword-blades."

"We have risen," says another poet, "and our arrows have flown; the blood which stains our garments scents us more sweetly than the odor of musk."³

"I was made of iron," Antal exclaims, "and of a heart more stubborn still; I have drunk the blood of mine enemies in the hollow of their skulls and am not surfeited."

In illustration of this insensibility may be quoted, two incidents in the life of Mohammed: Seven hundred Coraidite Jews who had been taken prisoner, were having their throats cut by the side of long graves, under the eyes of the Prophet; as night was falling, he had torches brought, so as to put off the mournful business till the morrow.⁴ A number of Arab captives, taken at Beder, were being put to death, to one of them who begged for mercy the Prophet said: "I thank the Lord that he has delighted

1 Dozy, *Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne*, t. i., pp. 16, 17. Perron, *Les femmes Arabes avant l'Islamisme*. Caussin de Perceval, *Essai sur l'Histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme*, t. ii., p. 281.

2 Herder, *Idées sur la philosophie de l'Histoire*, p. 73

3 Safy *Il Dine Il Holli*.

4 A. Savary, *Koran*, p. 47.

my eyes by thy death”; and when the dying man asked who would take care of his little child, Mohammed replied: “The fire of hell.”¹

The solitary life of the Bedouin has developed his spirit of independence; in the desert the individual is free; he obeys no government; he escapes all laws. There is but one rule — the rule of the strongest.²

Sometimes, when their independence was threatened by neighboring nations, Romans, Persians or Abyssinians, the tribes assembled together to defend their liberty, but as soon as the danger was past they dispersed.

When Abraha-el-Achram invaded the Hedjaz with forty thousand Abyssinians, and after having reduced Tebala and Taief set himself to penetrate the fortress of Mecca, the neighboring tribes leagued together under the command of Abd-el-Mottaleb; but when once the enemy had been driven back, the tribes resumed their liberty.³ This spirit of independence, this exaggerated development of individuality appears at every turn in the course of Arab history. The Caliphs had to struggle without ceasing against the turbulence of the tribes, who were hostile to all regular government and incapable of submitting to discipline. It was these tribal rivalries that in the end broke up the unity of the Empire by adding an element of disturbance to the disruptive forces of the conquered nations.

The spirit of anarchy is characteristic of the Semite;⁴ wherever he rules, there follows disorder and revolution. Jewish history, and that of Carthage, provide us with numerous examples; and, nearer our own time, the crisis of authority that has overturned Russia, has recruited its most powerful leaders and theorists from the Jewish element.

Any concentration of population is impossible in the desert owing to the lack of resources; at the same time, an isolated individual would be too feeble to contend with the dangers of a wandering life. Hence the Bedouins have been obliged to group themselves in families, and this is the basis of their social organization. The family enlarged has grown into the tribe, but the members of the same tribe do not all live together; they form small family groups united by the solidarity of birth and community of interests.

All the individuals of a tribe recognize the same common ancestor; they call this *acabia*, congenital solidarity, a rudimentary form of patriotism. In this way the Quraysh, to whom Mohammed belonged, trace their descent back to Fihir-Quraysh, of traditionally free origin, for he was

1 Haines, *Islam a Missionary Religion*, p. 36.

2 G. Sale: *Observations historiques et critiques sur le Mahométisme*

3 Sedillot, *Histoire des Arabes*, t. i., p. 43.

4 Renan, *Études d'histoire religieuses*

regarded as the descendant of Ishmael by Adnan, Modher, etc. ¹ The members of the same tribe are, literally, brothers; moreover this is the name by which men of the same age address each other. When an old man speaks to a young one, he calls him "Son of my brother."

The Bedouin is ready to make any sacrifice for his tribe; for its glory or its prosperity this egoist will risk his life and property. "Love your tribe," says a poet, "for you are bound to it by ties stronger than any existing between husband and wife."²

Throughout the whole course of Muslim history, wherever the Arabs are found, in Syria, in Spain, or in Africa, one notes the devotion of the individual to his tribe, at the same time as the rivalry between the different tribes. The notable upon whom the Caliph has been pleased to confer a high appointment loses no time in devoting himself to the interests of his own tribe, and at once arouses the anger of the others, who intrigue against him until they procure his disgrace, when the game begins over again with somebody else.

The Bedouin lives for himself and his tribe, beyond it he has no friends; his neighbor is the man of his tribe, his relation. Faithfulness to his pledged word, honesty and frankness only concern members of the tribe, the contribules.³

Each tribe selects as its chief the most intelligent habits of sobriety and plunged into the worst debauchery. Mohammed declared that he loved three things better than all else: perfumes, women and flowers. This might be the Bedouin's device; it is at any rate his ideal, and the Prophet did not forget it. His paradise is a place of carnal pleasures and material enjoyments, such as a nomad of the desert pictures to himself.

Ceaselessly absorbed by the cares of his adventurous life, the Bedouin concerns himself only with immediate realities. He fights to live and cares but little for philosophy. He is a realist, and not a theorist; he acts and has no time to think.

His faculties of observation have been developed at the expense of his imagination, and without imagination no progress is possible. It is this that explains the stagnation of the Bedouin over whom centuries pass without in any way changing his mode of life.⁴

1 Seignette, *Traduction de Sidi Khelil*, p. 700.

2 Abu' Labbas M Qhamed surnamed Mobarred, quoted by Ebn Khallikan in *La vie des hommes illustres*

3 Dozy, op. cit. p. 40.

4 Dozy, *Essai sur l'Histoire de l'Islam*

The Arab is in fact totally devoid of imagination; a contrary opinion is generally held and must be revised. The impetuosity of his nature, the warmth of his passions, the ardor of his desires have caused him to be credited with a disordered imagination. His language, poor in abstract words, and only able to express an idea exactly by the help of similes and comparisons, has maintained the illusion. Nevertheless, the Arab is the least imaginative of beings; his brain is dry; he is no philosopher; and he has never put forth an original thought, either in religion or in literature.

Before Islam, the Bedouin, just emerged from Totemism, worshipped divinities personifying the heavenly bodies or natural phenomena: the stars, thunder, the sun, etc. But he has never had a mythology. Among the Greeks, the Hindus, the Scandinavians, the gods have a past, a history; man has molded them to his own likeness, he has given them his passions, his virtues, and even his vices. The gods of the Bedouin have no distinctive character; they are mournful divinities, one fears them, but one knows them not. The Arab Pantheon is inhabited by lifeless dolls, of whom, moreover, the greater part were brought in from outside, notably from Syria.¹

Further, the Bedouin had not much respect for his idols; he was quite ready to cheat them by sacrificing a gazelle when he had promised them a sheep, and to abuse them when they did not respond to his wishes. When Amrolcais set out to avenge the murder of his father, on the Beni-Asad, he stopped at the temple of the idol Dhou-el-Kholosa to consult fate by means of the three arrows, called "command," "prohibition" and "wait." Having drawn "prohibition," which forbade his projected vengeance, he tried again; but "prohibition" came out three times running; he then broke the arrows and throwing the pieces at the idol's head, cried: "Wretch! if it had been your father that had been killed, you would not have forbidden me to avenge him."²

There is the same absence of imagination in the conception of Islam; its very simplicity is a reflection of the Arab brain; while its dogmas are borrowed from other religions. The principle of the unity of Allah is of Sabeian origin; as is also the Muslim prayer and the fast of Ramadhan.³

If the mosque is without adornment, that is not from any premeditated design, but simply because the Arab is incapable of adorning it; it is bare like the desert, bare like the Bedouin brain.

1 Lenormant, p. 469; Fresnel, *Lettres sur l'histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme*

2 Dozy, *Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne*, t. i., pp. 21-22.

3 Renan, *Études d'histoire religieuse*

The Arab conception of the world was borrowed from the Sabeans and the Hebrews. The religious sects that came into being under the later Caliphs, and whose subtle doctrines exhibit an overflowing imagination, are of Indian and Egyptian inspiration. They represent exactly a reaction on the part of the subject peoples against the barrenness and poverty of the Muslim dogma and the Arab spirit.

In literature there is the same intellectual destitution. The Arab poets describe what they see and what they feel; but they invent nothing; if sometimes they venture on a flight of imagination, their fellow-countrymen treat them as liars. Any aspiration towards the infinite, towards the ideal, is unknown to them; and what they have always considered as of most consequence, even from the remotest times, is not invention but precision and elegance of expression, the technique of their art. Invention is so rare a quality in Arab literature that when one does meet with a poem or a story in which fancy forms any considerable element, it is safe to say at once that the work is not original, but a translation. Thus in the "Arabian Nights" all the fairy-tales are of Persian or Indian origin; in this great collection the only stories that are really Arab are those depicting manners and customs, and anecdotes taken from real life.

The oldest monument of pre-Islamic poetry, the Moallakat, are poor rhapsodies copied from one model: when you have read one of them you know the rest. The poet begins by celebrating his forsaken dwelling, the spring where man and beast come to quench their thirst, then the charms of his mistress, and finally his horse and his arms.¹

"When the Arabs, by virtue of the sword, had established themselves in immense provinces and turned their attention to scientific matters, they displayed the same absence of creative power. They translated and commented upon the works of the ancients; they enriched certain special subjects by patient, exact and minute observation; but they invented nothing; we owe to them no great and fruitful idea."²

From what has gone before, we may sum up the characteristics of the Bedouin in a few essential traits: he is a nomad and a fighter, incessantly preoccupied by the anxiety of finding some means of subsistence and of defending his life against man and nature; he leads a rough life full of danger. His faculties of struggle and resistance are highly developed, namely physical strength, endurance and powers of observation. Necessity has made him a robber, a man of prey; he stalks his game when he spies a

1 See translation of the Moallakat by Caussin de Perceval.

2 Dozy, loc. cit. pp. 13-14; Sedillot, *Histoire des Arabes*, II., pp. 12, 19, and 82.

caravan or the *douar* (camp) of some sedentary tribe. Like a wild beast, he sees a chance when it arises.

An egoist, his social horizon stops at the tribe, beyond which he knows neither friend nor neighbor. A realist, he has no other ideal than the satisfaction of his material wants — to eat, to drink, and to sleep. Having no time for thought or contemplation, his brain has become atrophied; he acts on the spur of the moment, we might almost say by his reflexes; he is totally devoid of imagination and of the creative faculty.

Finally, a simple creature, not far from primitive animality — a barbarian. Such is the man who has conceived Islam and who by the strength of his arm and the sharpness of his sword, has carved out of the world this Muslim Empire.